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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 003277

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SUBJECT: MEYER OPTIMISTIC ON HELSINKI IRAQ PROCESS

REF: HELSINKI 675 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. The August 31 - September 3 meeting of Sunni and Shia Iraqi politicians, hosted by the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) in Helsinki, went "better than expected," according to South African conflict resolution consultant and former SAG minister Roelf Meyer. Meyer was impressed that the Iraqi parties themselves were able to reach agreement on basic principles for future political reconciliation talks, with little outside involvement, although he acknowledged that the participants may not be able (or willing) to sell the process to their political bosses at home. Meyer singled out Irish academic and author Padraig O'Malley as the key mover on the initiative, and said that O'Malley planned to travel to Baghdad soon to brief the two Iraqi Vice Presidents on the Helsinki meeting. Meyer and his fellow South African and Northern Irish "facilitators" are prepared to continue their involvement in the Iraq initiative. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Roelf Meyer, former South African minister and conflict resolution consultant, briefed A/PolCouns and PolOff September 12 on the recent August 31 - September 3 meeting of Iraqi parties held in Helsinki, Finland. Meyer, who played an important role in South Africa's transition to democracy, was one of the key players in the Iraq talks, along with African National Congress (ANC) activists Mac Maharaj and Rashid Ismail, and Northern Ireland politicians Jeffrey Donaldson and Martin McGuinness. (NOTE: Meyer said the South African/Irish group briefed the Finnish ForMin on the talks before departing Helsinki. He understood that Donaldson and McGuinness had also briefed -- or were planning to brief -- U.S. officials, likely in Belfast. END NOTE.)

Origins of Meeting

13. (C) Meyer said the idea for the meeting emerged from a series of seminars held at Tufts University in Boston, beginning in early 2003. Meyer himself participated in a South African mission to Baghdad six weeks before the March 2003 U.S. intervention, in an attempt to convince Saddam Hussein to cooperate with the IAEA, a venture Meyer now acknowledges was "too late." Padraig O'Malley, an Irish author and academic who now teaches at the John W. McCormick

Graduate School of Business at the University of Massachusetts, participated in these seminars and has been the prime mover behind the Iraqi reconciliation initiative. O'Malley traveled to Iraq in advance of the Helsinki meeting to gain the support of the two Iraqi Vice Presidents. Meyer said the meeting was funded primarily by a Boston-based private U.S. businessman, who is supporting the initiative for humanitarian reasons (NFI).

14. (C) According to Meyer, once O'Malley had the buy-in from the Iraqis, he identified Finland as an appropriate venue for two reasons. First, Finland was willing to be "flexible" on allowing entry to the Iraqis. Second, the Helsinki-based Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) agreed to provide a venue and logistical support for the talks. Meyer stressed that the meeting was the personal initiative of O'Malley and that CMI's role was largely administrative, even though CMI later tried to claim credit for the success of the talks.

Surprising Success

15. (C) The initial goal of the meeting, Meyer said, was to share the South African and Northern Ireland experiences and "get the Iraqis talking." O'Malley invited six political entities, representing the major Sunni and Shia parties. Meyer characterized the participants as "middle managers," although he said that the Minister of State for National Dialogue took part in the talks. He stressed that the participants were there at the direction of their respective political leaderships (vice participating in a personal capacity) and that some consulted with their leadership in

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Iraq during the meetings.

16. (C) Following talks on the South African and Irish experiences and lessons learned, the South African/Irish team invited the Iraqis to discuss possible conditions for further dialogue. Much to their surprise, the Iraqis -- meeting on their own -- developed twelve "recommendations to start negotiations to reach national reconciliation," subsequently termed the "Helsinki Agreement" (reftel). In drafting these points, Meyer believes the Iraqis drew on the description by the Irish politicians of the role the Mitchell Principles played in their peace process. In a lengthy and sometimes heated discussion, the parties produced a list of nearly four dozen outstanding issues. They subsequently split into two clusters to discuss these issues, one on political and another on military/security issues. Out of these meetings, the military/security group agreed on nine "Political Objectives," including procedures for dealing with militias. The parties agreed to release both the Helsinki Agreement and Political Objectives to the public (see www.cmi.fi).

Next Steps

17. (C) Meyer reported that O'Malley plans to return to Baghdad to brief the two Vice Presidents on the talks, and had already discussed the meeting with one of them by phone (NFI). At the end of the talks, the political entities recognized they would have to "broaden the circle" to include the militias and other actors if the initiative was to succeed. Meyer acknowledged that he does not know if those involved in the Helsinki talks will be able to influence their political leadership in Iraq. Meyer and the other South African and Northern Irish leaders are prepared to continue their engagement in the initiative.

18. (C) Meyer said that in his view the international community pushed the Iraqis to negotiate a new constitution "before they were ready." He noted that South Africa took six years to negotiate its new constitution, even though

there was general agreement on its outlines. Iraq also has no history of democracy, Meyer observed, creating additional challenges.

Comment

¶9. (C) While we cannot comment on the utility of this initiative, we believe that Meyer is thoughtful and serious, and is genuine in his commitment to promote reconciliation in Iraq. Meyer is an experienced hand, having played similar conflict resolution roles in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Bolivia, Spain, and Nepal, not to mention his role in South Africa's transition to non-racial democracy. He is open to further discussions with U.S. officials on this initiative, and Post is prepared to pass on suggestions or background papers to Meyer if deemed useful.
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